



TESTIMONY OF HON. DARRYL BRACKEEN, JR.

CHAIR | GENERATION CHANGE CT

SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PUBLIC HEARING | FEBRUARY 22, 2021

Good morning, Senator Mae Flexer (Co-Chair), Representative Dan Fox (Co-Chair), Senator Rob Sampson (Ranking Member), Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco (Ranking Member) and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee. My name is Darryl Brackeen, Jr and I am a lifelong resident of New Haven and also serve as alderman for the city's 26th Ward.

I am also the board chair of Generation Change CT, a statewide political action committee whose mission is to build a stronger, fairer and more inclusive democracy and economy for all of Connecticut's residents. In this work, we are committed to making Connecticut a national leader in expanding voting rights and participation, and passing HB 6578, but with needed improvement, is extremely important to me because not only codifying but also expanding Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to other state agencies is a common-sense reform that saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation. However we must also expand AVR to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) will enhance the security and integrity of our elections by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registrations through an automatic process—which will deliver the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day.

77% of Connecticut voters support Automatic Voter Registration in a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll. Across the country, localities have saved an average of about \$3.54 in labor costs per registration by moving from a paper to an electronic method. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

Restoring the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole is also extremely important to me because disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state. Those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities—those with significant populations of Black and Latino people.



Connecticut has the most stringent criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast and it is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Furthermore, **felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after the Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and stamp out Black political power.** 20 states allow people on parole to vote and just two weeks ago New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole.

Preventing formerly incarcerated people from voting **undermines good-faith attempts at reintegration**, and artificially decreases the voting power of the communities in which people on parole reside.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is also absolutely necessary so that voters currently qualifying to vote absentee retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes.

Indeed, there are so many other critical voting reforms the state legislature can and should act on, several of which are outlined in Generation Change CT's Voting Rights CT policy agenda, which I've appended to my testimony for your further review and consideration.

Today, I urge you to pass HB 6578 but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies—and I urge you to pass SB 1017.

Thank you for your consideration.

Alderman Darryl J. Brackeen Jr.
City of New Haven



VOTING RIGHTS CT

Policy Agenda

In order to build a stronger, fairer and more inclusive democracy for all Connecticut residents, Generation Change CT (GCCT) is committed to advancing and supporting the following voting reforms for all local, state and federal elections in Connecticut, including primary, general and special elections.

1. **UNIVERSAL VOTER REGISTRATION:** Ensure every eligible person in CT is registered to vote.
 - **Automatic Voter Registration (AVR):** Codify into state law “Motor-Voter Registration” (currently a [memo of agreement](#)) – and expand AVR to include other state agencies.
 - **Same-Day Registration (SDR) and Election Day Registration (EDR):** Allow all eligible persons to register to vote (or update their registration status) and cast their ballot at the same time at all poll sites on Election Day and, in the future, during early voting periods.
 - **Pre-Registration:** Pre-register 16- and 17-year-olds.
2. **UNIVERSAL VOTER ACCESS:** Ensure every eligible person has the time & a fair opportunity to vote.
 - **State Holiday:** Make the November general election a [state holiday](#).
 - **PTO:** For primary and special elections, require employers to provide employees with paid time off for in-person voting (when employees do not have three consecutive hours before or after work when the polls are open).
3. **MODERNIZED VOTING OPTIONS:** Increase voter participation by offering multiple accessible, convenient and modern voting options.
 - **Early Voting:** Amend the CT state constitution to permit early voting, providing at least 15 days via in-person and at least 31 days via other options (ex. mail-in and e-voting).
 - **Mail-In Voting:** Amend the CT state constitution to allow mail-in voting (a.k.a. “no excuse absentee voting”) to be a permanent option for all voters. In addition, pass a state law requiring mail-in applications to be made available and submittable online and that prepaid return postage be included with the actual ballots. Also, increase the number of Ballot Drop Boxes so there is easy and equitable access for all communities.
 - **E-Voting:** Permit and provide electronic voting options via smartphone, tablet and computer, as is done [in multiple other towns, counties and states](#).



4. **BALLOT TRACKING & CURING:** Ensure every vote is accounted for and properly counted.
 - **Tracking:** Provide improved real-time tracking information for mail-in ballots via text or email (similar to USPS).
 - **Curing:** Amend state law to provide voters with the ability to cure their ballots when accidental or inadvertent mistakes are made.
5. **RESTORE VOTING RIGHTS:** Ensure the right to vote is not "denied" or "abridged" for any citizen regardless of their carceral status.
 - **Formerly Incarcerated:** Provide automatic restoration of voting rights and automatic voter registration for all formerly incarcerated or convicted individuals irrespective of probation, parole or fines associated with conviction.
 - **Incarcerated:** Moving forward, permit all eligible persons to retain their voting rights while incarcerated, [as is the case in Vermont and Maine](#).
6. **EXPAND THE FRANCHISE:** Let more Connecticut residents have a voice and a vote in the direction of their local community and in the election of their political leaders.
 - **Permanent Residents:** Provide municipalities with the [option to permit non-citizen permanent residents to vote in local elections](#).
 - **16- and 17-year-olds:** [Lower the voting age to 16](#) for all local and state elections.
7. **END GERRYMANDERING:** Give voters "[fair maps, fair representation and a fair say](#)" so that voters actually get to choose their politicians and not the other way around.
 - **Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC):** Establish a nonpartisan and truly independent redistricting commission empowered to draw fair maps for state and congressional districts.
 - **Prison-based Gerrymandering:** When drawing districts, [count incarcerated persons where they are from](#), not where they are imprisoned.

ABOUT GENERATION CHANGE CT (GCCT)

Generation Change CT is a state-based political action committee that seeks to build a stronger, fairer and more inclusive democracy and economy for all of Connecticut's residents. GCCT is committed to making Connecticut a national leader in: expanding voting rights and participation; advancing democratic and electoral reforms; and increasing economic opportunity and security. In our work, we are especially committed to centering those from traditionally underrepresented and underserved communities, as we seek to secure a better, brighter and more progressive future for Connecticut. To learn more, go to generationchangect.com. To contact us, email generationchange@gmail.com.